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Qaddafi Tied to Shooting of Libyan in U.S.

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FORT COLLINS, Colo., May 23 — Minutes before the "corporate recruiter" was due to visit last Oct. 14, Farida Zagallai, a Libyan student here, turned to her husband, Faisal, and, she recalled the other day, said nervously: "Maybe it's the hit man. Do you think he's been sent by Qaddafi?"

Six months earlier, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had warned Faisal, also a graduate student at Colorado State University, that he was one of 24 students on a Libyan list of people to be killed because of their opposition to the regime of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

Mrs. Zagallai remembers that her husband shrugged his shoulders in answer to her question and said: "I thought about it this morning. But I've got my gun."

Half an hour later, Faisal lay unconscious on the floor of his apartment, shot by a man who, the police have now charged, was an American mercenary recruited by the Libyan Government. But Faisal lived, and evidence left behind by the suspected assassin led American authorities to him, and, six months later, to the Libyan Government.

A New Mexican Is Arrested

On April 22 the F.B.I. arrested Eugene A. Tafoya of Truth or Consequences, N.M., and charged him with attempting to kill Mr. Zagallai. Mr. Tafoya, now being held in Fort Collins, is a 25-year veteran of the Marines and the Army who retired in 1976. He won a Bronze Star for his service with the Army Special Forces, or Green Berets, in Vietnam.

Two weeks later, the Reagan Administration ordered the Libyan Embassy in Washington — the "People's Bureau" as the Libyans call it — to close down and expelled all 27 of its diplomats. State Department officials say Mr. Tafoya's arrest was the catalytic incident leading to the decision, part of an Administration effort to expose the official use of terror by the Libyan Government.

More than that, in the view of officials in Washington, the assault on Mr. Zagallai underlined the growing fragility of Colonel Qaddafi's political situation, with growing defections from Libyan officials and students all over the world.

Mr. Zagallai, 35 years old, a thin, in-

tense man with thick glasses, has recovered. But one .22-caliber bullet passed through his skull, severing an optic nerve and blinding him in his right eye. Another bullet is still lodged near his palate, and it left a small depression above his right temple. A third, fired at a range of three feet, missed him completely.

Next month, Mr. Zagallai expects to defend his doctoral thesis on institution building in rural development. Mrs. Zagallai, a dark-haired woman of 34, has just received her Ph.D. in sociology.

Their caller that October night had botched his task to kill Mr. Zagallai, a leader of the growing underground opposition among the 5,000 Libyan students in the United States.

Only now has the significance of the incident been recognized. It marked the first known attempt by Colonel Qaddafi to kill an enemy in the United States. There is little doubt that the orders came from Tripoli. Four days after the shooting, Jana, the official Libyan press agency, said that Libya's World Revolutionary Committee had acted against Mr. Zagallai.

And, if the charges are correct, it is also the first known attempt by Colonel Qaddafi to employ an American mercenary for a killing. About a dozen foes of the Qaddafi regime are known to have been murdered in the spring of 1980 in Europe and the Middle East, but Libyan zealous were alleged to have been the gunmen in each case.

The Zagallais now move secretly from house to house in this otherwise quiet college town 60 miles north of Denver. They have a 6-year-old daughter in Libya whom they have not seen in two years. They cannot be quoted directly about their political views or activities. But from the police in Fort Collins, the F.B.I. in Denver and Albuquerque, court records, officials at the State Department and their friends, this story emerges.

Regime Sent Them to U.S.

The Zagallais come from prominent business families in Libya. His father was a critic of the old regime, a member of Parliament and Mayor of Tripoli under King Idris I. When the King fell in a bloodless coup in 1969, Faisal, a student at Ghar Yunis University in Benghazi, 400 miles east of Tripoli, joined the exultant street demonstrations. Farida's father was a minister of education and industry under the King, but she too enthusiastically greeted the new order. Colonel Qaddafi personally gave her the undergraduate diploma she won at Benghazi.

The two classmates, like several thousand to follow, were sent to the United States at the expense of the Qaddafi regime to learn English and a professional skill.

But they began to sour on the revolution as early as 1973, when Colonel Qaddafi abrogated all Libya's laws. Faisal was repeatedly chosen by Libyan students in the United States to represent them at conferences in Libya. There, he spoke out for a union of students free of Government control, a free press and the return of an orderly legal system. He quietly organized an independent union of Libyan students abroad. When Colonel Qaddafi publicly hung six dissident students in 1977, Mr. Zagallai helped lead demonstrations of masked Libyans in the United States.

The Zagallais were ordered back to Libya in 1976 and directed to promise that they would take no further part in opposition acts. But on his return to Fort Collins, Mr. Zagallai helped set up the Free Libyan Students Union, whose members and locations are supposed to be secret. The organization says that it has the allegiance of 2,000 Libyan students (a number that Washington regards as exaggerated), and it tries to smuggle leaflets and posters into Libya that denounce Colonel Qaddafi's regime.

The Zagallais lost their Libyan scholarships in 1979 and have had to depend on odd jobs and support from their families to survive.

They said that this made them all too receptive to a telephone call from a well-spoken woman last Oct. 13. They call that she said that she represented a company that was recruiting translators of technical manuals for the International Business Machines Corporation and other large concerns. Were the Zagallais interested in an interview for jobs paying \$2,000 a month?

They were, and a meeting was set with the recruiter for 7 P.M. the next day.

A Nervous 'Recruiter'

Despite much fiction and the movies, the "recruiter" was anything but a cool and polished killer, Mrs. Zagallai said. She noticed that the well-dressed, middle-aged caller was nervous, had been drinking and, in 10 minutes of awkward conversation, could not ask the questions that an interviewer would normally put.

Recalling what then happened, Mrs. Zagallai gave this account:

She went to her kitchen to bring the "recruiter" some orange juice.

He suddenly stood up and, with braced forearms, tried to force Mr. Zagallai to the couch. "It's him, Farida!" Mr. Zagallai shouted. She ran to the bedroom and tried to jump out of the ground-floor window, screaming for help.

Neighbors gathered to watch, she said, but none came forward. The "recruiter" fired three shots and fled.

Jana, the Libyan press agency, reported the event with this comment: "Zagallai studied at the expense of the community for 10 years. But instead of returning to serve his country and people, he became an agent and spy for American intelligence."

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